

# About Hong Kong's Tiananmen vigil

Thursday 4 June 2020, by [South China Morning Post](#) (Date first published: 4 June 2020).

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## **Hong Kong's Tiananmen vigil has been banned, but the city's spirit of commemoration for June 4<sup>th</sup> shines on.**

Published: 9:00am, 3 Jun, 2020

by **Holly Chik , Kimmy Chung and Jeffie Lam (SCMP)**

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3087246/hong-kongs-tiananmen-vigil-has-been-banned-citys-spirit>

with PHOTOS and VIDEOS.

*The cancellation of the event amid the Covid-19 pandemic has raised fears it will be permanently scrubbed from the political calendar.*

*The vigil is under a fresh spotlight this year as Beijing moves forward with a tailor-made national security law for Hong Kong.*

Honouring lost lives with white flowers, lit candles, evocative songs and speeches has long been part of the annual Tiananmen Square vigil at Hong Kong's Victoria Park. But none of that can happen at this year's anniversary.

The cancellation of the event for the first time in 30 years has upset political exiles, the event's organisers and faithful participants who have decried the move, saying the only large-scale public gathering on Chinese soil to remember the crackdown, a taboo subject in the country's recent history, risks being permanently scrubbed from the political calendar.

**Zhou Fengsuo, a student leader during the Tiananmen Square protests** who now lives in exile in the United States, told the Post he was distressed to learn that the city's police had banned this year's vigil because of social-distancing rules in place over the Covid-19 pandemic.

*"The generation of 1989 and those who experienced the protests in person have always yearned for and paid close attention to the candlelight vigil in Hong Kong, no matter where we are, for 30 years. It means a lot to us,"* the 52-year-old said.

*"When the Communist Party tried everything to obliterate the memory of the crackdown, candles in Hong Kong's Victoria Park continued to be held up, and comforted sufferers. It is so precious that no other commemoration can replace it."*

Since 1990, the **Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China** has held the vigil in remembrance of the crackdown ordered by Beijing on June 4, 1989 to end a weeks-long, student-led democracy protest.

The gathering in Victoria Park, an annual ritual of sombre tribute to the struggle of the students, was attended by more than 180,000 people last year.

In their letter of objection to this year's vigil, police cited the Hong Kong government's prohibition of public gatherings of more than eight people, which was on Tuesday extended to June 18, and said any large public assemblies would increase the risk of infection in the city.

The vigil's organisers have called on the public to join an online gathering on Thursday, and to light candles across the city. They say at least 100 street booths will be set up that afternoon to distribute candles, with the help of opposition lawmakers and district councillors.

Members of the alliance still plan to go to Victoria Park in groups of eight, and have encouraged people to join the vigil as individuals in districts across the city. *"Victoria Park is a public open space and some people will still go,"* alliance secretary Richard Tsoi Yiu-cheong said. *"We have confidence in Hongkongers that they will observe social-distancing rules and the ban on gatherings."*

The group was convinced banning the vigil was done for political reasons, believing its stated goals – which include rehabilitating the 1989 pro-democracy movement, ending one-party dictatorship and building a democratic China – were especially sensitive subjects this year.

China, already in a trade and technology war with the United States, has been caught up in escalating tensions over its handling of the virus and now Hong Kong.

The vigil is under a fresh spotlight this year as Beijing moves forward with a tailor-made national security law for Hong Kong. The law, which will prohibit acts of subversion, secession, terrorism or conspiring with foreign influences in the city, prompted the US to declare it was revoking Hong Kong's special trading status and other privileges with America.

**Zhou Fengsuo**, the former student leader, dismissed the Victoria Park vigil ban as yet another sign of China's lack of democracy.

*"It is showing the world that the regime never changed in the past 30 years,"* he said. *"The international community allowed it to continue to exist after the 1989 crackdown, which eventually took away the basic protection that Hong Kong enjoys."*

**Lee Cheuk-yan (HKCTU), who chairs the alliance**, recalled there were similar doubts whether the vigil could continue after 1997, when the city was returned to Chinese rule, and in 2003, when the local government tried to enact its own national security law.

*"In 1997, people asked us if that will be the last one. And in 2003 people asked whether this will be the last one,"* he said. *"This year, on the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary [of the crackdown], without even having the national security law in place, it was banned by the police in the name of the virus."*

**A survey by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Program** released on Tuesday found that the popularity rating of the alliance had dropped slightly from last year.

More than 40 per cent of the 1,001 local respondents said the alliance should not be disbanded, the lowest percentage since 2015, while 66 per cent said the Chinese government did the wrong thing in the 1989 crackdown.

The Tiananmen Square incident remains a taboo subject in China, and any mention of the June 4 incident is censored on Chinese social media. An official death toll has never been released.

In Hong Kong, **Democratic Party veteran Cheung Man-kwong**, a key member of the alliance, said the iconic vigil had witnessed two major declines there over the past three decades.

Turnout had shrunk to only tens of thousands a few years after the crackdown happened, he recalled, but the situation gradually improved after many teachers began taking their students to the

vigil in the 1990s.

The second challenge was the rise of localism in the wake of the 2014 Occupy movement for universal suffrage, he said, as young people slammed the vigil as “ritualistic” and argued that they should not be burdened with helping achieve democratic change on the mainland, insisting their focus should be on Hong Kong.

*“In 1997, people asked us if that will be the last one. And in 2003 people asked whether this will be the last one,”* he said. *“This year, on the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary [of the crackdown], without even having the national security law in place, it was banned by the police in the name of the virus.”*

Cheung Man-kwong said the alliance was determined to call on the public to light candles across the city as they did not want to let their followers down. *“Many of them are seniors who have attended the vigils for 30 years,”* he said.

**Tsoi, the alliance’s secretary**, said he was disappointed the vigil had been called off.

*“I would like to say sorry to Hongkongers and our supporters,”* he said, adding that the event was “irreplaceable”, and that long-time attendees would miss joining the peaceful gathering.

*“If it weren’t for Hong Kong and the annual vigil held by the alliance, no one would remember what June 4 is about. We at least kept the topic alive,”* Tsoi said.

*“Hong Kong is the only place where we could still gather a significant number of people for 30 years, as a form of protesting. It could last all these years because of the people of Hong Kong.”*

Tsoi, who was a leader in the movement of the city’s university students to support their protesting peers in Beijing, said his own memory of the crackdown remained undimmed by time.

*“I followed the situation in Beijing through the television from the evening of June 3, 1989 to the early morning on June 4. I can never forget ...*

*“For those who were sacrificed in the movement, I promised myself that I would fight for democracy in China. This belief remains important to me to this day.”*

**Chow Hang-tung, 35, vice-chairwoman of the alliance**, said her parents had brought her to the vigil in Victoria Park since she was in primary school.

*“I didn’t understand a lot, but the strong emotions planted a seed in my heart,”* she said.

When she studied at the University of Cambridge in England, she initiated a vigil on the campus with other Hongkongers, hoping to spread the information to students from the mainland.

Since Chow returned to Hong Kong in 2010, she has helped out with the gathering. Asked if she feared the new national security law would ban such gatherings, Chow vowed that it would continue.

*“It is up to us but not the authorities. As long as people’s hearts are there, the candles in Victoria Park will be lit up,”* she said.

**Retiree Kelvin Chiu**, in his 60s, and his wife have attended the vigil in Victoria Park every year since 1990. He said it was a pity the vigil would be banned for the first time, but he found it understandable given the pandemic.

*“It is OK, the form is not the key and we don’t need to be too stubborn about it. We can ‘be water’, commemorate the victims in other forms, for example, online,”* he said, referring to the strategy used by anti-government protesters to continue their actions despite obstruction or opposition.

Describing himself as a “peaceful protester”, Chiu said he had to thank youngsters in the city who fought to pursue democracy.

**Alliance secretary Tsoi** said he hoped Hongkongers could return to Victoria Park for future vigils.

*“No matter whether the online vigil will succeed this year, I hope to return [to the park] in the future if we can.”*

And **former student leader Zhou** still has an eye on the future. *“My biggest hope is that China will become democratic. I hope the candlelight will return to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the centre of political power in China, to remember those who were sacrificed.”*

## **Why Chinese activists are fighting to keep Tiananmen Square memories alive, 31 years on from crackdown**

Published: 8:00am, 3 Jun, 2020

by Mimi Lau (SMCP)

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3087226/why-chinese-activists-are-fighting-keep-tiananmen-square>

With PHOTOS and VIDEOS

*Current political climate has drowned out dissenting voices but a small group of campaigners say the events from June 4, 1989 are as relevant today as ever.*

*Veteran campaigners say the Covid-19 outbreak and other problems highlight the need for reform and free speech.*

**Byron Chen Chun** is better informed than most people in China, but he admits that this year's 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown nearly slipped his mind.

*"June 4? The date might have passed me by if you hadn't brought it up," he admitted. "It's just there have been too many competing agendas these days that hardly leave any room for one to reflect upon June 4," Chen said.*

Last year the Shenzhen-based political scientist and author fell foul of online nationalists after observing a protest across the border in Hong Kong and posting two pictures on mainland social media.

Even though they were only for private viewing, screen shots started circulating more widely - becoming a repeat trending topic on Weibo.

He found himself widely denounced as a supporter of Hong Kong independence and interrogated by police, while his personal information was shared across multiple platforms.

A piece he wrote based on his experience that analysed nationalism among young Chinese landed him a Hong Kong Human Rights Press Award, but the fervour unleashed on the Chinese mainland by the protests - as well as events such as the international response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating tensions between China and the US - have left Chen and other intellectuals feeling overwhelmed.

*"Political views are so polarised that there is no room for rational discussions or reasonable judgement. You will be labelled a supporter of independence if you show any liberal-leaning ideas about Hong Kong," Chen said.*

*"I haven't been able to write as much as I would like in the past months during the pandemic. It's not just my daily life that was affected but my mental capacity too, constantly occupied by thoughts such as 'what if the US and China go to war? Will there be a global recession? Will liberalism eventually come to an end in China?'*

*"[This] has kept any discussions about the June 4 anniversary exceptionally quiet this year."*

Nowadays, a detailed knowledge of **the events of June 4 1989** is limited to a select few, with the majority of the population, especially those who were born after 1989, remaining oblivious to one of the key events in modern Chinese history.

Thirty one years ago, a student-led protest movement staged mass demonstrations and weeks-long sit-ins in the heart of Beijing to protest against corruption and call for reform, transparency and democracy.

But on June 4 it ended with the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown, and 31 years later the Chinese authorities are far away from acknowledging any mistakes or admitting it was wrong to use the army to quell the protests.

Today, June 4 remains a political taboo. Any public discussions or commemorations are strictly

prohibited and even coded references are subject to heavy censorship online.

This year Hong Kong's annual candlelight vigil was refused permission for the first time – the authorities said it was to prevent the spread of Covid-19 – and a photographic exhibition held every year in Macau was banned.

**China's current leadership** has shown no inclination to yield to any of the demands made in 1989 for greater transparency and democracy, even if some observers warn this approach may not prove beneficial for the country.

Last week, the biggest political event of the year ended with senior Communist Party leaders stressing that they would persist with the current political system because they felt it suited the country's needs and conditions.

Wang Yang, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a body set up to advise the legislature, described it as *"democratic, united, pragmatic and progressive"*.

But **Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute in London**, said the CPPCC was moving away from its original purpose of providing independent advice to the Communist Party and becoming an echo chamber for the leadership.

Tsang said the Covid-19 outbreak should have highlighted the importance of allowing internal debates, even if open disagreements are not permitted.

But added: *"[President] Xi Jinping insisted on the opposite as the lesson to be drawn and by so doing he is not enhancing the party's capacity to deliver good governance for the country."*

His view was shared by **Jean-Pierre Cabestan**, a political science professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, who said *"dissenting voices have been silenced"* and warned that this meant the body was not able to play any role in resolving crises such as the pandemic, the Hong Kong protests or increasing tensions with the US.

But **Zhou Fengsuo, a US-based activist and former Tiananmen student leader**, said he saw a silver lining following the Covid-19 pandemic.

*"What makes this year encouraging is that we saw an unprecedented number of young Chinese students showing an interest in learning more about June 4 on Telegram channels,"* Zhou said, referring to an encrypted messaging app favoured by protesters and dissidents because of its freedom from government control.

Zhou said that previously mainlanders had shown little interest in talking to activists such as Wang Dan, another student leader in 1989, but the pandemic had driven more people to get over the "Great Firewall" to seek information from outside China.

*"Large-scale commemorations linking mainlanders with the activists were not possible in the past but such events can now happen thanks to the pandemic,"* he said.

He said incidents such as the death of Li Wenliang – the Wuhan doctor who tried to warn colleagues about the coronavirus – had also woken people up to the importance of free speech.

*"This is why the June 4 movement of 1989 is still of relevance to China today,"* he continued.

**Lee Cheuk-yan**, a veteran Hong Kong-based activist, is focussing his efforts to keep the flame of the Tiananmen protests alive by running a global online commemoration.

He said the theme for this year would be truth, life, freedom and resistance using the hashtag #6431Truth.

Lee also said the lessons of the pandemic and the death of Li have reminded more Chinese of the importance of free speech and government transparency.

*"These calls are still very much alive on social media despite stringent censorship being enforced [by Beijing], but these are exactly the same aspiration pursued by the June 4 student movement,"* Lee said.

*"As we move the discussion online, we can see a lot of interest and passion [among the participants]."*

*It's not that the people have already forgotten, it's just that they weren't given adequate channels to express themselves.*

*"People might appear to be suffering from amnesia because of crackdown and some may have to live in lies in order to survive. But the memory is still alive and the defiance is still in their bones," Lee said.*

## **Tiananmen vigil: thousands of Hong Kong police officers mobilised for banned June 4 events**

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3087451/tiananmen-vigil-thousands-hong-kong-police-officers>

Published: 11:38pm, 3 Jun, 2020

**by Clifford Lo and Chris Lau (SCMP)**

**More than 3,000 riot officers will be deployed on Thursday 4 to enforce a ban against the annual candlelight vigil** to commemorate the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and other public gatherings, according to police insiders.

They said the ban was being officially enforced on health grounds, and those trying to circumvent the rules by splitting into smaller groups would still be breaking the law.

The warning of a heavy police presence came as **organisers of the June 4 mass rally at Victoria Park said they still planned to go regardless, in groups of eight**, the limit for public gatherings for at least two more weeks under Covid-19 restrictions.

*"Police will observe and enforce the law as the situation requires,"* a high-ranking officer told the Post.

Police sources said attempts to get around the law by meeting in groups of eight or fewer would fail if the total number of people gathering for a common purpose in a public place exceeded that figure.

**They said some 3,000 riot officers would be ready, with the legislature** also expected to vote on the controversial national anthem bill, which would outlaw public and intentional insults to March of the Volunteers.

About 2,000 of them would be deployed on Hong Kong Island, where two water cannons were to be stationed at the government headquarters in Admiralty and near Beijing's liaison office in Sai Ying Pun, the sources said.

The remaining 1,000 officers would be based **in other districts**, such as Mong Kok, with another water cannon on standby in West Kowloon.

The insiders said police would take proactive and swift action as they did last Wednesday, when thousands took to the streets to protest against Beijing's proposed national security law for Hong Kong and the national anthem bill.

Many of the 396 arrested on that day for offences including unlawful assembly were held even before the protests had started.

The sources said the force was unlikely to deploy this "high-handed" strategy to stop people from gathering in Victoria Park, although that depended on how events unfolded.

One said this was because the threat to public order on Thursday was deemed "relatively moderate" – rather than the "high" level of risk ahead of the protests last Wednesday – as there were fewer online appeals for people to join demonstrations.

*"But it depends on the size of the crowd and circumstances developing on the site,"* he added.

As well as heading to **Victoria Park in small groups**, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of

Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, which has organised the vigil since 1990, has asked people to join **proceedings online and to light candles** distributed from 100 street booths across the city.

Organiser **Lee Cheuk-yan** said he expected police to issue them with fines for breaching the eight-person limit by factoring in other people around them. He said officers had adopted a similar strategy for the Labour Day demonstration on May 1.

He questioned how authorities could conclude that all those attending the Victoria Park vigil in small groups would be gathering for the same purpose and thus breaking social distancing rules. *"I could be commemorating the mother of a Tiananmen Square victim. Another person may be thinking about resistance,"* he said.

**Police have banned another opposition group**, the Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, from holding a separate vigil on Thursday evening in Sham Shui Po. An appeal was lodged but rejected on Wednesday.

**Barrister Anson Wong Yu-yat** said the police interpretation of rules on group gathering was debatable.

*"No one can say with certainty whether the court will regard two or more groups of eight protesters physically assembling in a place, while keeping 1½-metre distance between each group, as collectively constituting a prohibited group gathering,"* he said.

**A spokesman from the Food and Health Bureau** said: *"Whether a particular gathering is a group gathering depends on the actual circumstances of the case, such as whether the gathering is organised beforehand, whether there is any interaction between the participants, and whether the gathering only lasts for a very short period of time."*

Breaching the social distancing rules carries

**- a fine of HK\$2,000 (US\$258) for participants**

**- and a HK\$25,000 fine and six months in jail for organisers.**